

# Pushing the Limits: A case study in promoting community conversations through informal STEM learning



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# NOAA PLACE Grant

## What

- **P**ublic **L**ibraries **A**dvancing **C**ommunity **E**ngagement
- \$1,000 Grant Awarded to Larry J. Ringer Library
- “Book Club + Science Cafe” Program Format

## Who

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Science partner from Texas A&M University
- Bryan + College Station Public Library System
- Public Libraries across U.S. – LJR Library only in TX

## When

- One Wednesday a month June – August 2017
- One theme per session: Change, Community, Strategy



# Bryan + College Station

## Location

Brazos Valley/Central Texas

## Population

College Station

Bryan

Est. 112,000

Est. 83,000

62.1% < age 25

43% < age 25

## Major Industries & Employers

Education, Healthcare, Arts,  
Hospitality, Retail

Source: census.gov American Fact Finder



# Local 'Atmosphere'

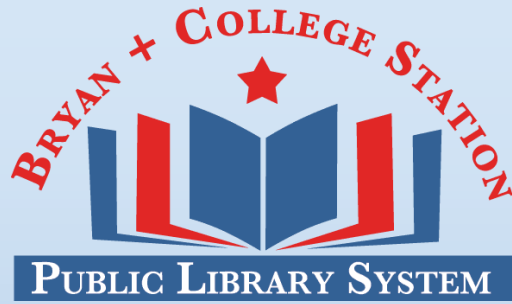
	Bryan, TX	College Station, TX	USA
# Population, 2017	86,402	106,701	324,209,135
% Education Attainment, Bachelor's Degree, 2017	15.38%	27.45%	18.59%
% Education Attainment, Master's Degree, 2017	5.99%	15.93%	7.91%
% LIFESTYLE (DEMOGRAPHICS)   POLITICAL OUTLOOK   ANY LIBERAL, 2016	8.29%	10.67%	16.30%
% LIFESTYLE (DEMOGRAPHICS)   POLITICAL OUTLOOK   ANY CONSERVATIVE, 2016	42.17%	44.39%	36.26%
% LIFESTYLE (DEMOGRAPHICS)   POLITICAL OUTLOOK   MIDDLE OF THE ROAD, 2016	40.76%	35.80%	40.63%

Source: SimplyAnalytics



## Previous Issues

- Complaints over LGBTQ+ materials
- Popular magazines challenged



## WHY?

**Weather & Climate Knowledge**

**Community & University Ties**

**Increased Adult Participation**

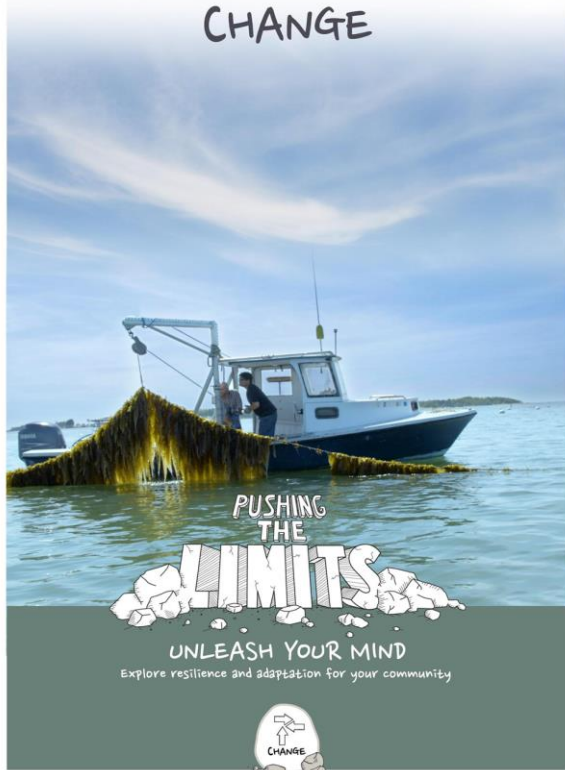




**TEXAS A&M**  
UNIVERSITY®



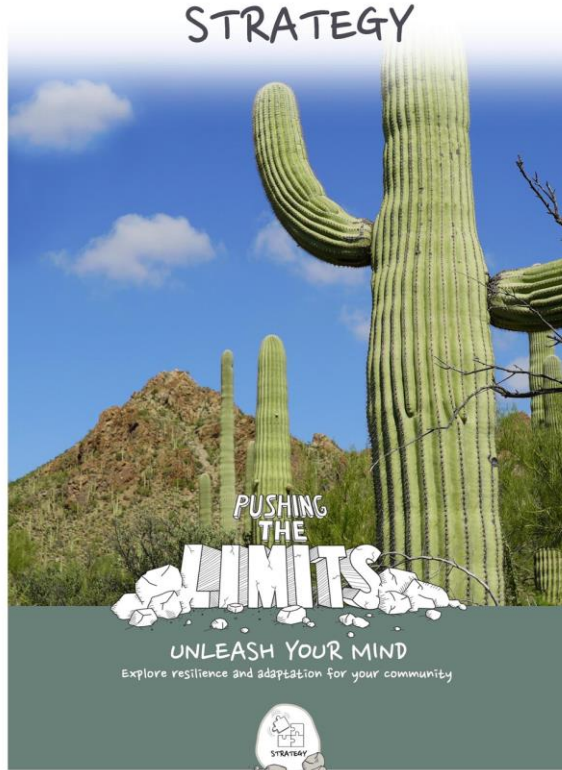
# Session Themes

## CHANGE



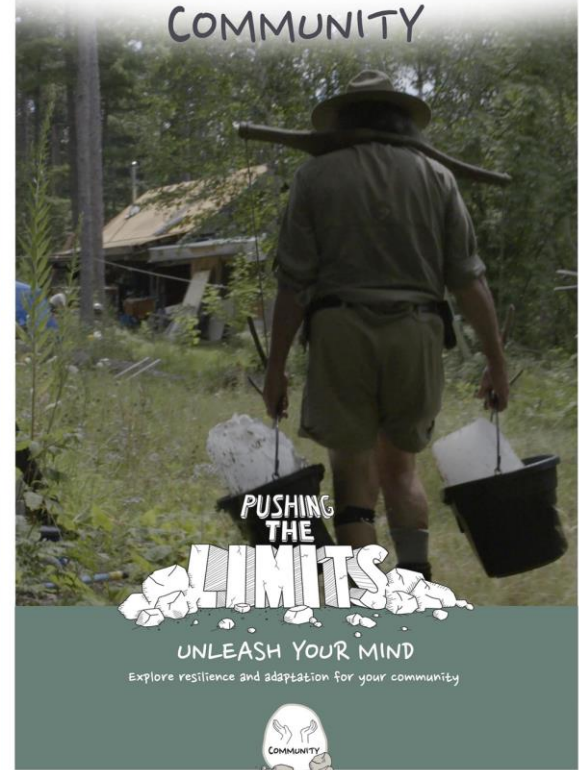
 Pushing the Limits - PLACE is a reading, viewing and discussion program for adults in communities served by rural libraries, made possible by grants from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Science Foundation. @Dawson Media Group, L.L.C. 2015 - 2017 



## STRATEGY



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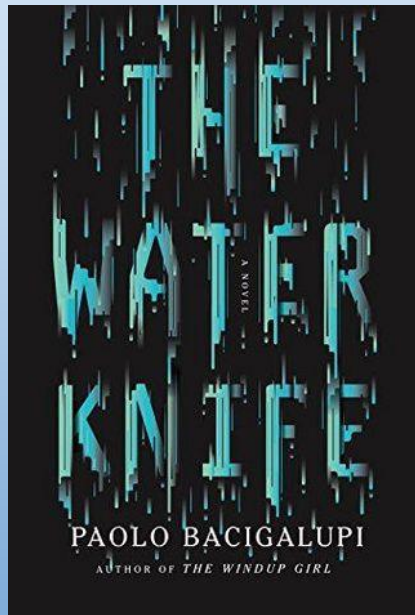
## COMMUNITY



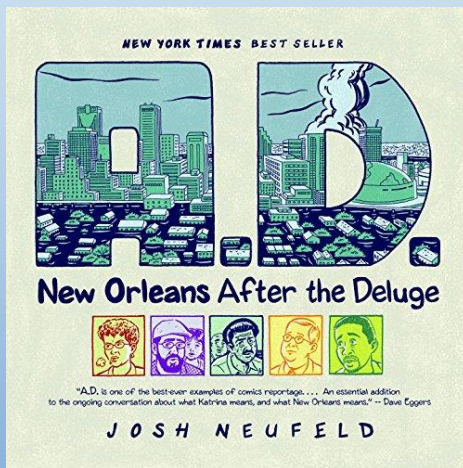
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# PLACE Program Structure

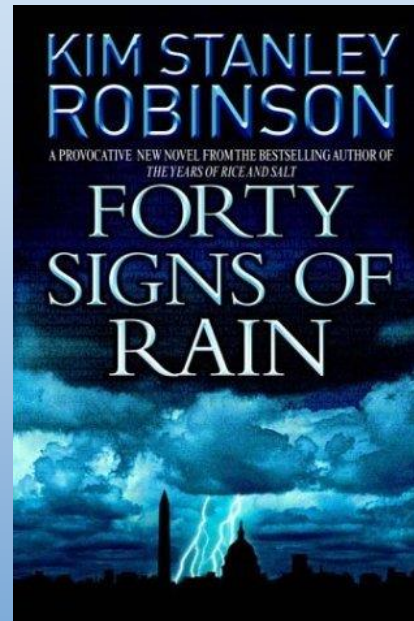
## Book Club



The Water Knife,  
by Paolo Bacigalupi



A.D.: New Orleans  
After the Deluge,  
by Josh Neufeld



Forty Signs of Rain,  
by Kim Stanley  
Robinson

# Science Partner

Dr. Gunnar Schade

- Department of Atmospheric Sciences, Texas A&M University
- Research Focus: Exchange of trace gases between the biosphere and the atmosphere



## Why have a science partner?

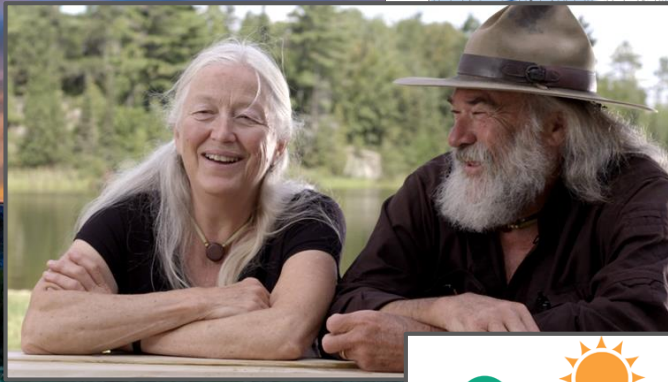
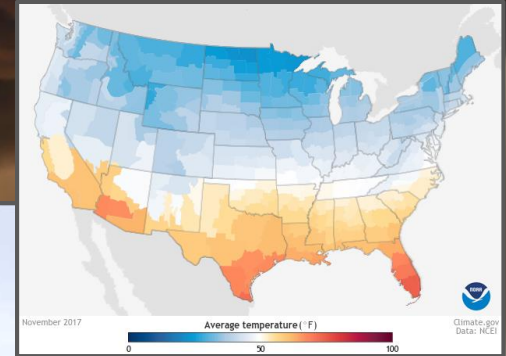
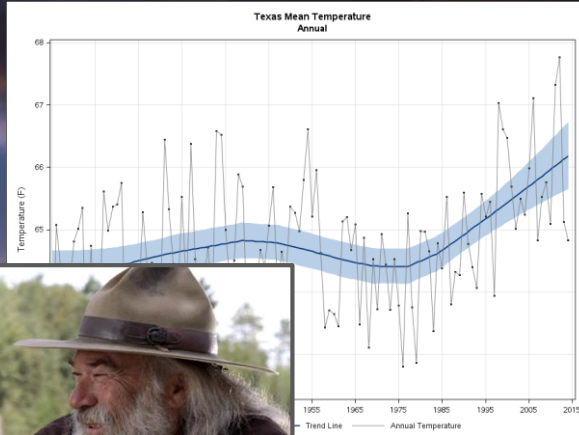
- Adds legitimacy to a potentially controversial program
- Strengthens ties between academia & public
- Access to larger pool of resources
- Go-to person for science-related questions





# PLACE Program Structure

## Science Cafe



COMMUNITY TOOL BOX

# Program Planning & Logistics

## Marketing

- Social Media
- Radio
- Flyers
- Listservs

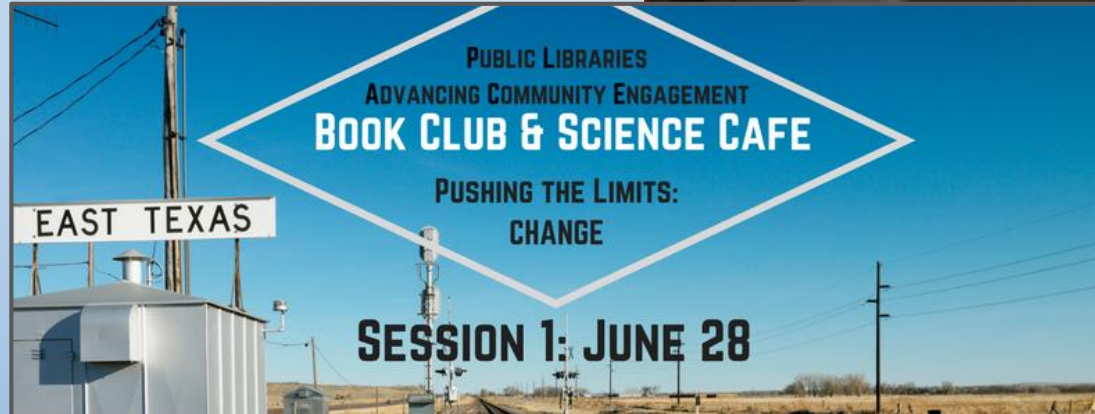
## Budget

- Assigned Books
- Door Prizes
- Food & Drink/Decor



## Logistics

- Meeting Room Availability
- Schedule Coordination



# Public Reaction



## B/CS Politics

- 2016 Presidential Election:
  - 58.5% **Republican**
  - 39.5% **Democrat**

## Positive Feedback (!!)

- No negative reactions
- High program attendance
- New 'groups' of attendees



# What worked?

## **Science Advisor**

Kept participants engaged and at ease, open

## **Setting & Date/Time**

Convenient for many different target audiences

## **Consistent Content**

Helped avoid negative reactions and kept sessions focused

## **Spin-Off Book Club**

Requested by participants  
Focus on STEM/STEAM subjects



# What would we do differently?

1. **Introductory session** – needed to explain program intent and content
2. **No book club portion** – this was intimidating to many; better as separate program
3. **Increased marketing** – wider distribution of flyers & social media
4. **Avoid paper registration** – Completely inaccurate picture of attendance





# Takeaway:

## Entry Point for Libraries & STEM

1. Good starting point for libraries wishing to promote scientific understanding
2. Casual setting promotes discussion and discovery
3. Can draw different patron base to programming
4. Climate change does not have to equal controversy

Questions?